

5 Examples of equivalents comprising one or more conservative amino acid substitutions including one or more conservative amino acid substitutions within the same group of predetermined amino acids, or a plurality of conservative amino acid substitutions, wherein each conservative substitution is generated by substitution within a different group of predetermined amino acids.

10 Accordingly, mimics of the complex, or fragments thereof according to the invention may comprise, within the same mimic, or fragments thereof or among different mimics, or fragments thereof, at least one substitution, such as a plurality of substitutions introduced independently of one another. Mimics of the complex, or fragments thereof may thus comprise conservative substitutions independently of one another, wherein at least one glycine (Gly) of said mimic, or fragments thereof is substituted with an amino acid selected from the group of amino acids consisting of Ala, Val, Leu, and Ile, and independently thereof, mimics, or fragments thereof, wherein at least one of said alanines (Ala) of said mimics, or fragments thereof is substituted with an amino acid selected from the group of amino acids consisting of Gly, Val, Leu, and Ile, and independently thereof, mimics, or fragments thereof, wherein at least one valine (Val) of said mimic, or fragments thereof is substituted with an amino acid selected from the group of amino acids consisting of Gly, Ala, Leu, and Ile, and independently thereof, mimics, or fragments thereof, wherein at least one of said leucines (Leu) of said mimic, or fragments thereof is substituted with an amino acid selected from the group of amino acids consisting of Gly, Ala, Val, and Ile, and independently thereof, mimics, or fragments thereof, wherein at least one isoleucine (Ile) of said mimics, or fragments thereof is substituted with an amino acid selected from the group of amino acids consisting of Gly, Ala, Val and Leu, and independently thereof, mimics, or fragments thereof wherein at least one of said aspartic acids (Asp) of said mimic, or fragments thereof is substituted with an amino acid selected from the group of amino acids consisting of Glu, Asn, and Gln, and independently thereof, mimics, or fragments thereof, wherein at least one of said phenylalanines (Phe) of said mimics, or fragments thereof is substituted with an amino acid selected from the group of amino acids consisting of Tyr, Trp, His, Pro, and preferably selected from the group of amino acids consisting of Tyr and Trp, and independently thereof, mimics, or fragments thereof, wherein at least one of said tyrosines (Tyr) of said mimics, or fragments thereof is substituted with an amino acid selected from the group of amino acids consisting of Phe, Trp, His, Pro, preferably an amino acid selected from the group of amino acids consisting of Phe and Trp, and independently thereof, mimics, or fragments thereof, wherein at least one of said arginines (Arg) of said fragment is substituted with an amino acid selected from the group of amino acids consisting of Lys and His, and independently thereof, mimics, or fragments thereof, wherein at least one lysine (Lys) of said mimics, or fragments thereof is substituted with an amino acid selected from the group of amino acids consisting of Arg and

His, and independently thereof, mimics, or fragments thereof, wherein at least one of said aspargines (Asn) of said mimics, or fragments thereof is substituted with an amino acid selected from the group of amino acids consisting of Asp, Glu, and Gln, and independently thereof, mimics, or fragments thereof, wherein at least one glutamine (Gln) of said mimics, or fragments thereof is substituted with an amino acid selected from the group of amino acids consisting of Asp, Glu, and Asn, and independently thereof, mimics, or fragments thereof, wherein at least one proline (Pro) of said mimics, or fragments thereof is substituted with an amino acid selected from the group of amino acids consisting of Phe, Tyr, Trp, and His, and independently thereof, mimics, or fragments thereof, wherein at least one of said cysteines (Cys) of said mimics, or fragments thereof is substituted with an amino acid selected from the group of amino acids consisting of Asp, Glu, Lys, Arg, His, Asn, Gln, Ser, Thr, and Tyr.

It is clear from the above outline that the same equivalent or fragment thereof may comprise more than one conservative amino acid substitution from more than one group of conservative amino acids as defined herein above.

Conservative substitutions may be introduced in any position of a preferred predetermined Hp-Hb complex of fragment thereof. It may however also be desirable to introduce non-conservative substitutions, particularly, but not limited to, a non-conservative substitution in any one or more positions.

A non-conservative substitution leading to the formation of a functionally equivalent fragment of the sequences in Figure 1 or 2 would for example i) differ substantially in polarity, for example a residue with a non-polar side chain (Ala, Leu, Pro, Trp, Val, Ile, Leu, Phe or Met) substituted for a residue with a polar side chain such as Gly, Ser, Thr, Cys, Tyr, Asn, or Gln or a charged amino acid such as Asp, Glu, Arg, or Lys, or substituting a charged or a polar residue for a non-polar one; and/or ii) differ substantially in its effect on polypeptide backbone orientation such as substitution of or for Pro or Gly by another residue; and/or iii) differ substantially in electric charge, for example substitution of a negatively charged residue such as Glu or Asp for a positively charged residue such as Lys, His or Arg (and vice versa); and/or iv) differ substantially in steric bulk, for example substitution of a bulky residue such as His, Trp, Phe or Tyr for one having a minor side chain, e.g. Ala, Gly or Ser (and vice versa).

Substitution of amino acids may in one embodiment be made based upon their hydrophobicity and hydrophilicity values and the relative similarity of the amino acid side-chain substituents, including charge, size, and the like. Exemplary amino acid substitutions which take various of the foregoing characteristics into consideration are well known to those of skill in

the art and include: arginine and lysine; glutamate and aspartate; serine and threonine; glutamine and asparagine; and valine, leucine and isoleucine.

5 The addition or deletion of an amino acid may be an addition or deletion of from 2 to preferably 10 amino acids, such as from 2 to 8 amino acids, for example from 2 to 6 amino acids, such as from 2 to 4 amino acids. However, additions of more than 10 amino acids, such as additions from 10 to 200 amino acids, are also comprised within the present invention. In the discussion of deletions and additions reference is made to a monomeric form of the complex, i.e. two haemoglobin chains and one haptoglobin chain. In the multimeric forms additions/deletions may be made individually in each monomer of the multimer.

10 It will thus be understood that the invention concerns Hp-Hb complexes comprising at least one fragment capable of binding at least one CD163 receptor or a variant thereof, including any variants and functional equivalents of such at least one fragment.

15 The Hp-Hb complex according to the present invention, including any functional equivalents and fragments thereof, may in one embodiment comprise less than 300 amino acid residues, such as less than 275 amino acid residues, such as less than 250 amino acid residues, such as less than 225 amino acid residues, such as less than 200 amino acid residues, such as less than 175 amino acid residues, such as less than 150 amino acid residues, such as less than 125 amino acid residues, such as less than 100 amino acid residues, such as less than 95 amino acid residues, for example less than 90 amino acid residues, such as less than 85 amino acid residues, for example less than 80 amino acid residues, such as less than 75 amino acid residues, for example less than 70 amino acid residues, such as less than 65 amino acid residues, for example less than 60 amino acid residues, such as less than 55 amino acid residues, for example less than 50 amino acid residues, such as less than 45 amino acid residues, for example less than 40 amino acid residues, such as less than 38 amino acid residues, for example less than 37 amino acid residues, such as less than 36 amino acid residues, for example less than 35 amino acid residues, such as less than 34 amino acid residues, for example less than 33 amino acid residues, such as less than 32 amino acid residues, for example less than 31 amino acid residues, such as about 30 amino acid residues, for example less than 30 amino acid residues, such as about 29 amino acid residues. The number of amino acid residues relate to the total number of amino acid residues in the complex independent of the complex being a linear amino acid sequence or a non-linear complex of amino acid sequences.

A fragment comprising the CD163 binding region of native Hp-Hb complex is particularly preferred. However, the invention is not limited to fragments comprising the CD163 receptor binding region. Deletions of such fragments generating functionally equivalent fragments of